

Overview of Offer Versus Serve (OVS) in the School Breakfast Program School Year 2021-22 (July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022)

OVS is a concept that applies to menu planning and the determination of reimbursable meals for grades K-12 in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP. OVS allows students to decline a certain number of food components in the meal and select the foods they prefer to eat, while reducing food cost and waste. OVS is optional at breakfast for all grades. OVS is not allowed for preschoolers (ages 1-4) or the Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP.

Detailed guidance on OVS is available on the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Offer versus Serve for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Overview of OVS at Breakfast

OVS applies to the daily SBP meal pattern requirements. To implement OVS, school food authorities (SFAs) must offer four food items from the three food components, in at least the full serving (minimum daily amount) for each grade group. For a reimbursable breakfast under OVS, students must select at least three food items, including at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitutions, if offered). The definition of food items and food components for breakfast is different from lunch. Food items are also credited differently at breakfast.



- A **food component** is one of the three food groups that comprise reimbursable breakfasts, including grains (with optional meat/meat alternates (MMA) as grain substitutions), fruits (with optional vegetable substitutions), and milk.
- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the three food components. It may contain one or more food components, or more than one serving of the same component. For example, SFAs may choose to credit a 2 ounce equivalent (oz eq) whole-grain bagel (one food component) as two food items (two grains). A selection of three different $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup servings of fruit (such as peaches, applesauce, and pears) contains three food items from one food component (fruits).

Table 1 summarizes the daily SBP meal pattern requirements for grades K-12 and the number of food items that students may decline under OVS.

Overview of OVS in the SBP

Table 1. Summary of OVS requirements for breakfast

SFA must offer at least four food items from the three food components ¹	Student must select
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Milk (1 cup)² 2. Fruits or optional vegetable substitutions (1 cup)^{3,4} 3. Grains (1 oz eq)⁵ 4. Additional item from either fruits (including vegetable substitutions) or grains (including MMA substitutions)^{6,7} 	<p>At least three food items, including at least ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitution, if offered).</p>
<p>¹ Each food item must be at least the full serving (minimum daily amount) for each grade group in the SBP meal pattern.</p> <p>² Allowable types of milk include unflavored low-fat (1%) milk and unflavored or flavored fat-free milk. SFAs must offer at least two different varieties, and at least one milk choice must be unflavored.</p> <p>³ The fruits component includes fresh fruits, frozen fruits, canned fruits (in juice, water, or light syrup), and dried fruits; and pasteurized full-strength fruit and vegetable juice (including vegetable/fruit juice blends). Fruits credit based on volume (cups), except dried fruits credit as twice the volume served (e.g., ¼ cup of raisins credits as ½ cup of the fruits component). Fruit juice together with vegetable juice cannot exceed half of the total fruits offered at breakfast during the week. The juice limit includes juice that is fresh, frozen, or made from concentrate; frozen juice pops made from 100 percent juice; pureed fruits or vegetables in fruit or vegetable smoothies; and juice from canned fruit served in 100 percent juice, unless the canned fruit is drained or served as an extra food. For more information, refer to the CSDE’s resources, Crediting Juice for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP and Crediting Smoothies for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP; and section 4 of the CSDE’s Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12.</p> <p>⁴ SFAs may substitute vegetables for the fruits component at any breakfast. Vegetables credit based on volume (cups), except raw leafy greens credit as half the volume served (e.g., 1 cup credits as ½ cup of vegetables). For more information, visit the “Vegetables Component for Grades K-12” section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.</p> <p>⁵ All grains must be whole grain-rich (WGR). For more information, refer to the CSDE’s resources, Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12, Crediting Enriched Grains in the NSLP and SBP, and Crediting Breakfast Cereals for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP; and visit the “Grains Component for Grades K-12” section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.</p> <p>⁶ The fourth planned food item cannot be another serving of milk.</p> <p>⁷ SFAs may substitute 1 oz eq of MMA for 1 oz eq of grains after offering 1 oz eq of grains. Meat/meat alternate substitutions credit toward the minimum weekly grains requirement. For more information, refer to sections 3 and 4 of the CSDE’s Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12 and visit the “Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Grades K-12” section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.</p>	

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For a breakfast to be reimbursable under OVS, SFAs must meet the criteria below.

- **Menu planning:** Breakfast menus must include at least four food items from the three food components (milk, fruits, and grains). The planned serving for each food item must be at least the full serving (minimum daily amount) for each grade group in the SBP meal pattern. The four food items may include two servings of grains (either two of the same grain or two different grains) or two servings of fruits (either two of the same fruit or two different fruits) but cannot include two servings of milk. For information on the SBP meal patterns, visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and refer to section 1 of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12](#).
- **MMA substitutions:** SFAs may choose to substitute MMA in place of grains after offering 1 oz eq of grains. For example, a breakfast menu that includes 1 oz eq of whole-grain toast (grains component) may also include 1 oz eq of low-fat cheese (MMA component) offered as a substitution for the grains component. Meat/meat alternate substitutions credit toward the minimum weekly grains requirement. For more information, refer to sections 3 and 4 of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12](#).
- **Vegetable substitutions:** SFAs may substitute vegetables for the fruits component at any breakfast, without including vegetables from other subgroups in the weekly menu. This flexibility is in effect for school year 2021-22. For more information, refer to the [“Vegetable Substitutions at Breakfast”](#) section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- **Duplicate servings:** SFAs may offer duplicate servings of the fruits component (including vegetable substitutions) and the grains component (including meat/meat alternate substitutions). For example, SFAs may allow students to select two servings of the same 1 oz eq grain item (such as two servings of toast) or the same two ½-cup serving of the fruits component (such as two ½-cup serving of fruit salad). SFAs must clearly communicate this information on the breakfast menu and cafeteria signage, and must train food service staff on how to recognize reimbursable meals with duplicate servings.
- **Larger amounts:** SFAs may serve larger amounts of any component if the weekly breakfast menu does not exceed the USDA's dietary specifications (nutrition standards) for calories, saturated fat, and sodium. For information on meeting the dietary specifications, refer to section 6 of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12](#). **Note:** SFAs must serve additional grains on some days to meet the SBP meal pattern's minimum weekly requirements for each grade group. For more information, refer to section 4 of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12](#).

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- **Unit pricing:** Meals must be priced as a unit, i.e., students pay the same price regardless of whether they take three or more food items. SFAs must establish one price for a complete reimbursable breakfast in the paid meal category and one price for a complete reimbursable breakfast in the reduced-price meal category. SFAs may set different unit prices (tiered pricing) for various combinations of foods offered as a reimbursable breakfast. However, all students, including those eligible for free and reduced-price meals, must be allowed to select any reimbursable breakfast. Breakfasts with a higher unit price must be available at no cost for all free-eligible students, and at no more than 30 cents for all reduced-eligible students.
- **Identifying reimbursable meals:** SFAs should plan breakfast menus to make it easy for students to select (and food service staff to identify) reimbursable meals. SFAs must post signage that clearly communicates the food items for each menu choice, and indicates what students must select for a reimbursable meal. SFAs should also provide training for school food service staff on the SBP meal pattern components, including how to recognize reimbursable meals under OVS. For guidance on signage and staff training, refer to the CSDE's [*Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*](#).
- **Required student selections:** Students must select at least three food items, including at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitutions, if offered) and the full serving of at least two other food items. Selections of less than $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits or vegetables do not credit as a food item for OVS, unless the student also selects additional fruits or vegetables to provide at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup. To encourage selections of reimbursable meals, SFAs should offer all fruits and vegetables in $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup servings.
- **Declining foods:** After selecting the required three food items (including at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits or vegetables), students may decline any other food items. Students may take smaller portions of the declined food items. However, selections of less than the full serving cannot credit as a food item for OVS. For example, if the breakfast menu provides 1 oz eq of grains from two $\frac{1}{2}$ -oz eq WGR mini blueberry muffins, students must take both muffins to credit as one food item for OVS. One muffin ($\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq) does not credit because it is less than the full serving.



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Crediting Food Items at Breakfast

The USDA allows SFAs to choose how to credit fruits and grains as food items in school breakfast menus. These flexibilities do not apply to OVS at lunch.

- **Fruits component (including optional vegetable substitutions):** A ½-cup serving of fruit (or vegetable substitution) credits as one food item. SFAs may choose to credit the required 1 cup of the fruits component (including vegetable substitutions) as either one or two food items. To encourage student selections of reimbursable meals, SFAs should offer all fruit choices (and vegetable substitutions, if offered) in ½-cup servings, and post signage that clearly communicates that students may select either one or two servings.
- **Grains component (including optional meat/meat alternate substitutions):** A 1-oz eq serving of grains (or meat/meat alternate substitution) credits as one food item. SFAs may credit foods that provide more than 1 oz eq as more than one food item if the additional amount is the full 1 oz eq. For example, a whole-grain muffin or bagel containing 2 oz eq of grains may credit as two food items (two grains). An omelet containing 2 oz eq of MMA as a grain substitution may credit as two food items (two grains). Amounts less than 1 oz eq do not credit for OVS. SFAs must round down to the nearest whole number of oz eq. For example, a whole-grain muffin that contains 1½ oz eq of the grains component credits as 1 oz eq (one food item).

The examples below show how some menu offerings credit as food items at breakfast. For detailed guidance, refer to section 3 of the CSDE's *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*.

- A 2-oz eq whole-grain bagel is one food component (grains) that contains two food items (two grains). Alternatively, SFAs may choose to credit the bagel as one food item (one grain).
- A menu offering a variety of ½-cup servings of fruit choices (such as blueberries, grapes, applesauce, and peaches) is one food component that includes four food items (four fruits).
- A yogurt parfait made with 1 oz eq of low-fat yogurt (meat/meat alternate as a grain substitution), ½ cup of sliced fresh fruit, and 1 oz eq of whole-grain granola contains two food components (grains and fruit) that provide three food items (two grains and one fruit).

When choosing how to credit fruits and grains, SFAs should plan breakfast menus to make it easy for students to select (and staff to identify) reimbursable meals. SFAs must post signage that clearly communicates the meal components for each menu choice and indicates what students may select. SFAs should also provide training for school food service staff on the breakfast meal pattern components, including how to recognize reimbursable meals under OVS.

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Examples of OVS at Breakfast

The tables below show examples of OVS at breakfast. For additional guidance and more OVS examples, refer to the CSDE's *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*.



Table 2. OVS examples for a breakfast menu with five food items

Planned breakfast menu		Meal pattern components	Food items
Whole-grain bagel, 2 ounces		Grains (G), 2 oz eq	2 G
Strawberries, ½ cup		Fruits (F), ½ cup	1 F
Orange slices, ½ cup		F, ½ cup	1 F
Choice of unflavored low-fat (1%) or unflavored/flavored fat-free milk, 1 cup ⁴		Milk (M), 1 cup	1 M
Students must select at least three food items including at least ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitution, if offered).			
Student selects	Food items <i>Must be at least 3</i>	Do the 3 food items include at least ½ cup of F or V? <i>Must be "Yes"</i>	Reimbursable meal?
Strawberries (1 F) Milk (1 M)	2	Yes	No. The selected meal contains only two food items (1 F and 1 M).
Bagel (2 G) Strawberries (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G and 1 F).
Bagel (2 G) Milk (1 M)	3	No	No. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G and 1 M) but is missing at least ½ cup of F.
Strawberries (1 F) Orange (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 F and 1 M).
Bagel (2 G) Orange (1 F) Milk (1 M)	4	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains four food items (2 G, 1 F, and 1 M).

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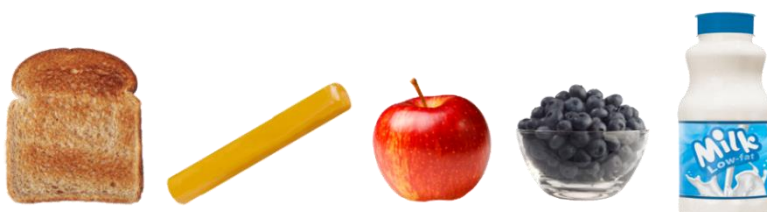
Table 3. OVS examples for a breakfast menu with five food items including a meat/meat alternate substitution

Planned breakfast menu		Meal pattern components	Food items
Whole-wheat toast, 1-ounce slice		G, 1 oz eq	1 G
Low-fat string cheese, 1 ounce <i>MMA substitution</i>		G, 1 oz eq	1 G
Apple slices, ½ cup		F, ½ cup	1 F
Blueberries, ½ cup		F, ½ cup	1 F
Choice of unflavored low-fat (1%) or unflavored/flavored fat-free milk, 1 cup ⁴		M, 1 cup	1 M
Students must select at least three food items including at least ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitution, if offered).			
Student selects	Food items <i>Must be at least 3</i>	Do the 3 food items include at least ½ cup of F or V? <i>Must be "Yes"</i>	Reimbursable meal?
Toast (1 G) String cheese (1 G) Blueberries (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 F and 2 G including 1 from MMA substitution).
Toast (1 G) String cheese (1 G) Milk (1 M)	3	No	No. The selected meal contains three food items (1 M and 2 G including 1 from MMA substitution) but is missing at least ½ cup of F.
String cheese (1 G) Apple slices (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 G from MMA substitution, 1 F and 1 M).
Toast (1 G) Blueberries (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 G, 1 F, and 1 M).
Toast (1 G) Apple slices (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 G, 1 F, and 1 M).
Blueberries (1 F) Apple slices (1 F) String cheese (1 G)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 F and 1 G from MMA substitution).

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Table 4. OVS examples for a breakfast menu with choices from four food items

Planned breakfast menu		Meal pattern components	Food items
Grains: <i>Choose up to two items</i> ¹			
Whole-grain cereal flakes, 1 cup ²	MMA substitutions:	G, 1 oz eq	1 G
Whole-grain muffin, 2 ounces ²	Low-fat yogurt, ½ cup		
Oatmeal, ½ cup ²	Cheese stick, 1 ounce		
Whole-grain toast, 1-ounce slice ²	Peanut butter, 2 tablespoons		
Fruit: <i>Choose two fruits or one fruit and one juice</i> ³			
Applesauce, ½ cup	Orange, ½ cup	F, 1 cup	2 F
Banana, ½ cup	Blueberries, ½ cup		
Peaches, ½ cup	100 percent juice, ½ cup		
Apple, ½ cup			
Milk: <i>Choose one</i>			
Low-fat or fat-free milk		M, 1 cup	1 M
Students must select at least three food items including at least ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitution, if offered).			
Student selects	Food items <i>Must be at least 3</i>	Do the 3 food items include at least ½ cup of F or V? <i>Must be "Yes"</i>	Reimbursable meal?
Yogurt, two servings (2 G) Blueberries (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G from MMA substitutions and 1 F).
Cheese sticks, two (2 G) Banana (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G from MMA substitutions and 1 F).
Cereal, two servings (2 G) Milk (1 M)	3	No	No. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G and 1 M) but is missing at least ½ cup of fruit.



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Table 4. OVS examples for a breakfast menu with choices from four food items, *continued*

Student selects	Food items <i>Must be at least 3</i>	Do the 3 food items include at least ½ cup of F or V? <i>Must be “Yes”</i>	Reimbursable meal?
Yogurt (1 G) Cheese stick (1 G) Applesauce (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G from MMA substitutions and 1 F).
Oatmeal (1 G) Applesauce (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 G, 1 F, and 1 M).
Muffin (1 G) Orange (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 G, 1 F, and 1 M).
Cereal (1 G) Yogurt (1 G) Blueberries (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G including 1 from MMA substitution and 1 F).
Yogurt, two servings (2 G) Blueberries (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G from MMA substitutions and 1 F).
Bagel (1 G) Peanut butter (1 G) Juice (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G including 1 G from MMA substitution and 1 F).
Blueberries (1 F) Peaches (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 F and 1 M).

¹ This menu allows two choices from the grains component, including MMA substitutions. Students may select two servings of the same grain grains (including MMA substitutions) or two different grains (including MMA substitutions).

² SFAs must document that the product or recipe serving provides the required oz eq or minimum creditable grains. For more information, refer to the CSDE’s resources, [Grain Ounce Equivalents for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP](#) and [Calculation Methods for Grain Ounce Equivalents for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP](#).

³ This menu allows two choices from the fruits component. Students may select two servings of the same fruit, two different fruits, or one fruit and one juice. Menu planners may choose to credit each ½-cup serving of fruit as one food item.

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Resources

Crediting Foods for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Meal or No Meal Activity: Breakfast (from the CSDE's presentation "What's for Breakfast: Meeting the Meal Pattern Requirements for the School Breakfast Program"):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Pattern-Training-Materials/Documents>

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning-Guide-for-School-Meals>

Offer versus Serve for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Offer-versus-Serve-for-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Offer versus Serve Guidance for the NSLP and SBP (USDA):

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP41-2015av2.pdf>

Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals:

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/OVS/OVSGuide.pdf>

Offer versus Serve Materials (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/offer-versus-serve-national-school-lunch-program-posters>

Offer versus Serve Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers: School Breakfast Program (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/offer-vs-serve-breakfast-program-tip-sheet>

Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Program-Guidance-School-Nutrition-Programs>

School Breakfast Program (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/School-Breakfast-Program>

School Breakfast Webinar Part 1: Offer Versus Serve Overview and Strategies for Success (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sbp/school-breakfast-webinar-part-1-offer-versus-serve-overview-and-strategies-success>

USDA Memo SP 24-2020, CACFP 13-2020 and SFSP 13-2020: Questions and Answers for the Child Nutrition Programs during School Year 2020-2021:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19/questions-and-answers-child-nutrition-programs-during-sy-2020-21>

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For more information, review the CSDE's *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*, and visit the CSDE's **OVS** webpage, or contact the **school nutrition programs staff** in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition//-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/OVS/OVSSBP.pdf>.

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- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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